

Congresswoman Matsui Votes to Support Clean Estuaries Act

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Bipartisan Bill Will Help Support Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-Sacramento) voted in favor of H.R. 4715, which would reauthorize the Environmental Protection Agency's National Estuary Program (NEP) through Fiscal Year 2016. Protecting our nation's estuaries – especially the San Francisco Estuary Partnership, which contains the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta – is of critical economic and environmental importance. As the largest estuary on the West Coast, it provides drinking water to 22 million Californians, irrigates 4.5 million acres of farmland, and supports important economic activities including commercial and sport fishing, shipping, industry, agriculture, recreation and tourism.

“Ensuring that our nation's estuaries are ecologically healthy is good public policy,” stated Representative Matsui. “Estuaries and coastal areas are central to the prosperity of our region and our country. They provide significant economic value nationwide through tourism, energy production, navigation and agriculture and it is critical that we act to protect them.”

In fact, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Research Council estimate that our estuaries provide habitat for 75 percent of the U.S. commercial fish catch and 80-90 percent of the recreational fish catch. Each year commercial and recreational fishing accounts for \$185 billion in revenues, and sustain more than two million jobs.

Unfortunately many of the nation's estuaries are in poor ecological health. This bipartisan bill would improve the National Estuary Program – increasing its authorization from \$35 million annually to \$50 million annually. In doing so, the bill would also provide new accountability measures, and require the EPA to report on the program's effectiveness.

In 1987, Congress created the NEP to protect nationally significant estuaries that are deemed to be threatened by pollution, development, or overuse. It is a non-regulatory program that supports 28 approved estuary programs – including the Morro Bay National Estuary Program, San Francisco Estuary Partnership, which consists of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission in California – through grant funding. Each program is a consensus-based, stakeholder driven organization that develops and implements a management plan for restoration and protection of the estuary.

H.R. 4715, which passed the House today, would also mandate that all approved estuary programs be evaluated and update their management plans on a periodic basis, increasing transparency and performance. Accepted programs would be required to identify estuary vulnerabilities to climate change impacts and prepare adaptation responses, as well as work to educate the public on estuary health issues and develop performance measures and targets. Moreover, this

legislation would enhance coordination by requiring federal agencies to participate in the management planning process.

“In Sacramento, we are blessed with the beauty and lifeblood that are provided by the American and Sacramento Rivers, and greatly benefit from both the agriculture and wildlife that are supported by the Delta,” added Matsui. “The Clean Estuaries Act is an important step forward in helping to restore and protect the Delta and other estuaries across the country.”

Key Provisions of the Bill

Increases National Estuary Program’s Authorization. The bill would reauthorize EPA’s National Estuary Program (NEP) through FY 2016 and increases the program’s authorization from \$35 million annually to \$50 million annually to add additional estuaries.

Incorporates New Accountability Measures. The bill would require that each approved estuary program under the NEP be evaluated every four years to determine whether it is meeting the objectives of its Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). Evaluation results would be provided to the public, and unfavorable evaluations would require individual estuary programs to propose modifications to their CCMPs or risk reduction or elimination of federal assistance.

Requires Consistency with Locally-Driven Priorities. The bill would mandate that federal agency activities within the watershed are consistent with locally-driven estuary restoration priorities, and that federal agencies coordinate with each other in that regard.

Requires EPA Evaluation of Program’s Effectiveness. The bill would call on the Administrator of EPA to undertake a programmatic evaluation of the NEP to assess its effectiveness in improving water quality, natural resources, and sustainable uses of included estuaries, and report the findings to Congress.

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